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# The Jewish Quarterly Review.

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APRIL, 1894.

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## SOME ASPECTS OF RABBINIC THEOLOGY.

### I.

#### INTRODUCTORY.

MY object in choosing a title borrowed from Professor Butcher is to indicate that from the following series of articles there must not be expected either finality or completeness. Nor will they make any attempt at that precise and systematic treatment which we are rightly accustomed to claim in other fields of scientific inquiry. I have often envied the certainty and confidence with which Jewish legalism, Jewish transcendentalism, Jewish self-righteousness, are delineated in our theological manuals and histories of religion; but I have never been able to emulate either quality. I have rather found, when approaching the subject a little closer, that the peculiar mode of old Jewish thought, as well as the unsatisfactory state of the documents in which this thought is preserved, "are against the certain," and urge upon the student caution and sobriety. In these introductory paragraphs I shall try to give some notion of the difficulties which lie before us.

To begin with the difficulties attaching to the unsatisfactory state of Rabbinic documents. A prominent theologian has lately, when referring to the Rabbis, declared

that one has only to study the Mishnah to see that it was not moral or spiritual subjects which engrossed their attention, but the characteristic hair-splitting about ceremonial trifles. There is some truth in this statement. The Mishnah, which was compiled about the beginning of the third century A.C., consists of sixty-one (or sixty-three) tractates, of which only one, known by the title of "The Chapters of the Fathers," deals with moral and spiritual matters in the narrower sense of these terms. Still this is not the whole truth, for there are also other tractates, occupying about one-third of the whole Mishnah, which deal with the civil law, the procedure of the criminal courts, the regulation of inheritance, laws regarding property, the administration of oaths, marriage, and divorce. All these topics, and many similar ones relating to public justice and the welfare of the community as the Rabbis understood it, are certainly not to be branded as ceremonial trifles; and if the kingdom of God on earth means something more than the mystical languor of the individual, I cannot see on what ground they can be excluded from the sphere of religion. But, apart from this consideration—for it seems that theologians are not yet agreed in their answer to the question whether it is this world, with all its wants and complications, which should be the subject for redemption, or the individual soul, with its real and imaginary longings—there runs, parallel with this Mishnah, a vast literature, known under the name of Agadah, scattered over a multitude of Talmudical and Midrashic works, the earliest of which were compiled even before or about the same time as the Mishnah, and the latest of which, while going down as far as the tenth or even the eleventh century, still include many ancient elements of Rabbinic thought. In these compilations it will be found that the minds of the so-called triflers were also engrossed by such subjects as God, and man's relation to God; by righteousness and sin, and the origin of evil; by suffering and repentance and immortality; by the election of Israel, Messianic aspira-

tions, and many other cognate subjects lying well within the moral and spiritual sphere, and no less interesting to the theologian than to the philosopher.

It is these Talmudic and Midrashic works, to which I should like to add at once the older Jewish liturgy, which will be the main sources of the material for the following articles. Now I do not want to enter here into bibliographical details, which may be found in any good history of Jewish literature. But it may have been noticed that I spoke of "compilations"; and here a difficulty comes in. For a compilation presupposes the existence of other works, of which the compiler makes use. Thus there must have been some Rabbinic work or works composed long before our Mishnah, and perhaps as early as 30 A.C.<sup>1</sup> This work, or collection, would clearly have provided a better means for a true understanding of the period when Rabbinism was still in an earlier stage of its formation, than our present Mishnah of 200 A.C. Is it not just possible that many a theological feature, characteristic of the earlier Rabbis, found no place in the Mishnah, either because of its special design or through the carelessness or fancy of its compiler, or through some other consideration unknown to us? The consequence is that we are almost entirely deprived of any real contemporary evidence from the most important period in the history of Rabbinic theology. The Psalms of Solomon may, in want of a better title, be characterised as the Psalms of the Pharisees; but to derive from them a Rabbinic theology is simply absurd. They have not left the least trace in Jewish literature, and it is most probable that none of the great authorities we are acquainted with from the Talmud had ever read a single line of them, or even heard their name. The same is the case with other Apocryphal and Apocalyptic works, for which Rabbinism is often made responsible. However strange it may seem,

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<sup>1</sup> See D. Hoffmann "Magasin für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums," (Berlin), viii., p. 170.

the fact remains that whilst these writings left a lasting impress on Christianity, they contributed very little towards the formation of Rabbinic thought. The Rabbis were either wholly ignorant of their very existence, or stigmatised them as silly, fabulous, or esoteric (a milder expression for heretical), and thus allowed them no permanent influence upon Judaism.

Passing from the Mishnah to the Talmud proper (the Gemara) and to the Midrash, the same fact meets us again. They, too, are only compilations, and from the defects of this their fundamental quality we frequently suffer. There is, for instance, the interesting subject of miracles, which plays such an important part in the history of every religion. The student is naturally anxious to see whether it formed also an essential element of Rabbinic Judaism. Nor are we quite disappointed when we turn over the pages of the Talmud with this purpose in view. There is hardly any miracle recorded in the Bible for which a parallel might not be found in the Rabbinic literature. The greatest part of the third chapter of the Tractate Taanith, which is also called the Chapter of the Saints, is devoted to specimens of such supernatural processes performed by various Rabbis. But miracles can only be explained by more miracles, by regular epidemics of miracles. The whole period which saw them must become the psychological phenomenon to be explained, rather than the miracle-workers themselves. But of the Rabbinical miracles we could judge with far greater accuracy if, instead of the few specimens still preserved to us, we were in possession of all those stories and legends which once circulated about the saints of Israel in their respective periods.<sup>1</sup> Another problem which a fuller knowledge of these ancient times might have helped us to solve is this: With what purpose were these miracles worked,

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<sup>1</sup> About the probability that there may have existed other collections of such stories, see Rapoport *Bikure Haithim* xii., 78 and 79.

and what were they meant to prove? We are told that "the Jews ask for signs as the Greeks seek for wisdom." As a fact, however, in the whole of Rabbinic literature, there is not one single instance on record that a Rabbi was ever asked by his colleagues to demonstrate the soundness of his doctrine, or the truth of a disputed Halachic case, by performing a miracle. Only once do we hear of a Rabbi who had recourse to miracles for the purpose of showing that his conception of a certain Halachah was the right one. And in this solitary instance the majority declined to accept the miraculous intervention as a demonstration of truth, and decided against the Rabbi who appealed to it.<sup>1</sup> Nor, indeed, were such supernatural gifts claimed for all Rabbis. Whilst many learned Rabbis are said to have "been accustomed to wonders," not a single miracle is reported about the great Hillel, or his colleague, Shammai, both of whom exercised such an important influence on Rabbinic Judaism. On the other hand, we find that such men, as, for instance, Choni Hammaagel,<sup>2</sup> whose prayers were so sought after in times of drought, or R. Channina b. Dossa, whose prayers were so often solicited in cases of illness,<sup>3</sup> left almost no mark on Jewish thought, the former being known only by the wondrous legends circulating about him, the latter being represented in the whole Talmud only by one or two moral sayings.<sup>4</sup> Thus we are really left in darkness about the importance of miracles and their meaning as a religious factor in those early times, and this doubt could only be cleared up by the discovery of some fresh documents.

As another instance of the damage wrought by the loss of those older documents, I will only allude here to the well-known controversy between the school of Shammai and that

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<sup>1</sup> See *Baba Mezia*, 59<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *Taanith* 23<sup>b</sup>; cp. *Jerushalmi Taanith* 64<sup>a</sup> and <sup>b</sup>. See *Seder Haddoroth* under this name.

<sup>3</sup> See *Berachoth*, 33<sup>a</sup>, and *Jer. Berachoth*, 10<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> *Aboth* iii. 9. See Bacher *Agadah der Tannaiten* I., 283, p. 2.

of Hillel regarding the question whether it had not been better for man not to have been created. The controversy is said to have lasted for two years and a-half. Its final issue or verdict was that, as we have been created, the best thing for us to do is to be watchful over our conduct.<sup>1</sup> This is all that tradition (or the compiler) chose to give us about this lengthy dispute; but we do not hear a single word as to the causes which led to it, or the reasons advanced by the litigant parties for their various opinions. Were they metaphysical, or empirical, or simply based, as it is so often the case, on different conceptions of the passages in the Scriptures germane to the dispute?<sup>2</sup> We feel the more cause for regret when we recollect that the members of these schools were the contemporaries of the Apostles; when Jerusalem, as it seems, was boiling over with theology, and its market-places and Synagogues were preparing metaphysics and theosophies to employ the mind of posterity for thousands of years. What did the Rabbis think of all these aspirations and inspirations, or did they remain quite untouched by the influences of their surroundings? Is it not possible that a complete account of such a controversy as I have just mentioned, and which probably formed neither an isolated nor an unprecedented event, would have just furnished us with some information of which now we are so sorely in need?

In the Jewish liturgy we meet with similar difficulties. It is a source which has till now been comparatively neglected. Still, as we shall see, its contents are of the greatest importance for the study of Jewish theology. There is no reason to doubt that in its broad outlines this liturgy—as far as the Prayer Book is concerned—has its origin in the pre-Christian era, but it is at present so overgrown with additions and interpolations, that the original contents are hardly discernible from the constant accretions

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<sup>1</sup> *Erubin*, 13<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> For Hagadic instances, see *Rosh Hashanah* 16<sup>b</sup>, *Chagigah* 12<sup>a</sup>, 71, *Pesikta* B. 61<sup>b</sup>.

of succeeding ages. The Talmud, and even the Mishnah, occasionally quote some ancient liturgical passages, and these might prove useful in helping us to fix their date.<sup>1</sup> But, unfortunately, it was not thought necessary to give these quotations in full. They are only cited by the word with which they begin, so that we are left in uncertainty as to the exact contents of the *whole* prayer, and have only to rely on guesses.

Even more embarrassing than these textual difficulties, are those defects which are inherent in the peculiar nature of old Rabbinic thought. A great English writer has remarked "that the true health of a man is to have a soul without being aware of it; to be disposed of by impulses which he does not criticise." In a similar way the old Rabbis seem to have thought that the true health of a religion is to have a theology without being aware of it; and thus they hardly ever made—nor could they make—any attempt towards working their theology into a formal system, or giving us a full exposition of it. With God as a reality, Revelation as a fact, and the hope for Redemption as a most vivid expectation, they felt no need for formulating their dogmas into a creed, which, as was once remarked by a great theologian, is not repeated, because we believe, but that we may believe. What they had of theology, they enunciated spasmodically or "by impulses." Sometimes it found its expression in prayer "when their heart cried unto God;" at others in sermons or exhortations, when they wanted to emphasise an endangered principle, or to protest against an intruding heresy. The sick bed of a friend, or public distress, also offered an opportunity for some theological remark on the question of suffering or penance. But impulses are uncertain, incoherent, and even contradictory, and thus not always trustworthy. The preacher, for instance, would dwell more on the mercy of God, or on the special claims of Israel, when his people

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<sup>1</sup> See *Mishnah Tamid*, v. I. *Pesachim* 118<sup>a</sup>. Cp. Landshut הגיון לב שמונה עשרה to the



were oppressed, persecuted, and in want of consolation; whilst in times of ease and comfort he would accentuate the wrath of God awaiting the sinner, and his severity on the day of judgment. He would magnify faith when men's actions were lacking in inward motive, but he would urge the claim of works when the Law had been declared to be the strength of sin. When the Law was in danger he would appeal to Lev. xxvii. 34, "These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses," and infer that these laws, and no others, were to be observed for ever, and that no subsequent prophet might add to them.<sup>1</sup> At another time he would have no objection to introduce new festivals, *e.g.*, the Lighting of the Chanukah Candles, and even declare them to be distinct commands of God,<sup>2</sup> so long as they were, as it seemed to him, within the spirit of the Law. He would not scruple to give the ideal man his due, to speak of him as forming the throne of God,<sup>3</sup> or to invest him with pre-mundane existence;<sup>4</sup> but he would watch jealously that he did not become, as it were, a second god, or arrogate to himself a divine worship. I shall have frequent occasion to point out such apparent or actual contradictions.

The Rabbis, moreover, show a carelessness and sluggishness in the application of theological principles which must be most astonishing to certain minds which seem to mistake merciless logic for God-given truths. For example, it is said: "He who believes in the faithful shepherd is as if he believes in the word of him whose will has called the world into existence." . . . "Great was the merit of

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<sup>1</sup> *Sifra* (ed. Weiss), 115<sup>d</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *Shabbath* 23<sup>d</sup>. See also *Jer. Sukkah* 53<sup>d</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See *Gen. Rabbah* xlvii.

<sup>4</sup> See *Gen. Rabbah* i. about the pre-existence of the *name* of the Messiah. Cp. *ibid.* viii., about the soul of the Messiah. In section 6 of this chapter, mention is made of the souls of the righteous with whom God took counsel when he was going to create the world. Cp. Joel *Blicke*, ii. 181.

the faith which Israel put in God ; for it was by the merit of this faith that the Holy Spirit came over them, and they said *Shirah* to God, as it is said, 'And they believed in the Lord and his servant Moses. Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord.'"<sup>1</sup> . . . Again, "our father, Abraham, came into the possession of this world and the world hereafter only by the merit of his faith."<sup>2</sup> Of R. José it is recorded that he said: "If thou art desirous to know the reward awaiting the righteous, thou mayest infer it from Adam the First, for whose single transgression he and all his posterity were punished with death ; all the more then shall the good action of a man confer bliss upon him, and justify him and his posterity to the end of all generations."<sup>3</sup> Another Rabbi tells us that by the close contact of the serpent with Eve, he left in her a taint which infected all her seed, but from which the Israelites were freed when they stood before Mount Sinai, for there they came into immediate contact with the divine presence.<sup>4</sup> Is it not distressing to find that such sayings, which would have made the fortune of any ancient Alexandrian theosophist or modern Hegelian of the right wing, were never properly utilised by the Rabbis, and "theologically fructified?" The faithful shepherd and the bliss-conferring righteous were never admitted into the Rabbinic pantheon ; the concession made to the patriarch was never extended to his posterity, faith only modifying and vivifying works, but not superseding them, and even the direct contact with the Deity, which the fact of being present at the Revelation of Sinai offered to every Israelite, was only conceived as the beginning of a new life, with new duties and obligations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mechilta* (ed. Friedmann), 33<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *Mechilta*, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Sifra*, 27<sup>a</sup>. Cp. Delitzsch, *Hebrew Translation of the Romans* (Leipzig, 1870), p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> *Jebamoth* 103<sup>b</sup>.

This indifference and insensibility to theological niceties seems to be a vice from which not even the later successors of the Rabbis—the commentators of the Talmud—emancipated themselves entirely. I give one example: We read, in the name of R. Akiba, “Everything is foreseen; freedom of choice is given. And the world is judged by grace, and yet all is according to the amount of work.” This is the usual reading. But some of the best MSS. have the words, “And *not* according to the amount of work.”<sup>1</sup> The difference between the two readings being so enormous, we should naturally expect from the commentators some long dissertation about the doctrines of justification by grace or works. But nothing of the sort happens. They fail to realise the import of the difference, and pass it over with a few slight remarks of verbal explanation. Perhaps they were conscious that neither reading ought to be accepted as decisive, each of them being in need of some qualification implied by the other.

It will, therefore, suggest itself that any attempt at an orderly and complete system of Rabbinic theology is an impossible task; for not only are our materials scanty and insufficient for such a purpose, but, when handling those fragments which have come down to us, we must always be careful not to labour them too much, or to “fill them with meaning” which they were never intended to bear. All that these fragments can offer us are some aspects of the theology of the Rabbis, which may again be modified by some other aspects, giving us another side of the same subject. What we can obtain resembles rather a complicated arrangement of theological checks and balances than anything which the modern divine would deign to call a consistent “scheme of salvation.” Still, I

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<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Taylor's *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, Critical Notes, pp. 11 and 12. I add here MS., Oxford Heb. c. 17. Parma 802, 975. See *Machzor Vitri*, pp. 514, 515. Compare also *Die Responsen des H. Meschulam ben Kalonymos*, by Dr. Joel Müller, (Berlin, 1893), p. 11, note 19

am inclined to think that a religion which has been in working order for so many centuries, which contains so little of what we call theology, and the little theology of which possesses so few fixities (whilst even these partake more of the nature of experienced realities than of logically demonstrated dogmas)—that this religion forms so unique and interesting a phenomenon as to deserve a more thorough treatment than it has hitherto received. It is not to be dismissed with a few general phrases, only tending to prove its inferiority.

This brings me to one other introductory point which I wish to suggest by the word *Aspects*. *Aspects*, as we know, vary with the attitude we take. My attitude is a Jewish one. This does not, I hope, imply either an apology of the Rabbis, or a polemic tendency against their antagonists. Judaism does not claim the gift of infallibility for its teachers, and thus it is under no necessity to defend their errors. Nor does it justify its existence by the shortcomings of any of the other great creeds of the civilised world. It need not, therefore, attack them, though it has occasionally been compelled to take protective measures when these other creeds have threatened it with destruction. But what I want to imply and even to emphasise is, that my attitude towards Rabbinic theology is necessarily different from that taken by most commentators of the Pauline Epistles. A curious alternative seems always before them. Either the theology of the Rabbis must be wrong, its conception of God debasing, its leading motives materialistic and coarse, and its teachers lacking in enthusiasm and spirituality, or the Apostle to the Gentiles is quite unintelligible. I need not face this alternative. The theology of the Rabbis may not be perfect; but what theology is perfect? Is there any theology of long ago which does not stand in need of an apology when the tests of the nineteenth century are applied to it? Every theology has its mythology, its legends, its fables, and its folk-lore. All these paraphernalia of religion, valuable

as the service may be which they have rendered and are still perhaps rendering to some minds, cannot stand the searching tests of history and modern criticism. These tests have only too often been applied to Jewish theology. But has not this theology a centre of its own, which is God and nothing but God, elements of eternal truths and vital principles, which enabled it to withstand all hostile powers tempting it to remove or to destroy this centre which made it what it is? An attempt, however feeble, towards proving this, will be made in the following pages.

## II.

## GOD IS FAR, BUT NOT REMOTE.

Among the many strange statements by which the Jewish student is surprised, when reading modern divinity, there is none more puzzling to his mind than the assertion of the Transcendentalism of the Rabbinic God, and his remoteness from man. A world of ingenuity is spent to prove that the absence of the mediatorial idea in Rabbinic Theology is not a sign of its acceptance of man's close communion with God, but of its failure to establish the missing link between heaven and earth. Sayings of a legendary nature, as for instance, when a Rabbi speaks of God's abode in heaven, with its various partitions;<sup>1</sup> new epithets of God, such as Heaven or Supreme Being,<sup>2</sup> which antique piety accepted for the purpose of avoiding the name of God "being uttered in idleness"; terms expressive of his providence and his sublime holiness, as the Holy One, blessed be he, the King, the Lord of the World, or the Master of all Creation;<sup>3</sup> Hellenistic phrases, which crept into Jewish literature, but which never received, in the mouth of a Rabbi, the significance which they had with an Alexandrine philosopher, or a Father of the Church, are all brought forward to give evidence of the great distance which a Rabbinic Jew must have felt, and must feel, between himself and his God. How surprising to a Jewish student! Was he not, as a Jew, brought up to pray daily: "O our Father, merciful Father, ever compassionate, have mercy

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<sup>1</sup> See Weber *System der Altsynagogalen Palästinensischen Theologie*, Leipzig, 1880, pp. 158, 159. It is interesting that in the very passage in *Chagigah* 5<sup>b</sup>, where this stiff division between the inner and outer departments is given, it is also stated that in the latter God is mourning over the misfortunes of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> Weber, *ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, *ibid.*, p. 144.

upon us. . . . Thou hast chosen us from all peoples and tongues, and hast brought us near unto thy great name for ever in faithfulness, to thank thee and proclaim thy Unity in love ; blessed art thou, O God, who hast chosen thy people Israel, in love.”<sup>1</sup> Was he not taught to confess his sins daily in the following words :—“Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned ; pardon us, our King, for we have transgressed . . . blessed art thou, our God, who art gracious and dost abundantly forgive.” Has he heard his mother at the bedside of a sick relative, directing prayers to God, and appealing to him as “the beloved name, the gracious helper, the merciful Father, and the dear God ;” or is he under an illusion ? Are the millions of worshippers in the synagogue addressing themselves directly to God, the king and creator of the universe, the father in heaven ; or do they, in their thoughts, substitute for all these terms, the Memra or the Logos, or some other abstraction, of which the writer of these prayers was unaware ? For, according to what we are told by so many theologians, God must be too far, the King of the Universe too cosmopolitan, and the Father in heaven too high for the mind of the Jew, and thus an impossible object for worship. These are questions which readily suggest themselves when reading, for instance, the eleventh chapter of Weber’s book, the chapter entitled, *Der Jüdische Gottesbegriff*. And Weber is followed by the great majority of the writers on this subject. To his favourite theory of the predominance of the legalistic element in Jewish theology even God has to submit. He is not the God from whom the Torah has emanated, and on whom its authority rests, but is himself a feeble reflex of the law, improved occasionally by some prophetic notions, but jealously watched by the Rabbis not to come into too close a contact with humanity.

Yet the manifestation of God in Israel’s history was still as vivid to their mind and still as present as to the writer

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<sup>1</sup> See *Daily Prayer-Book*, edited by Rev. S. Singer (1890), p. 40.

of Deuteronomy or the author of Psalm lxxviii. "All souls," say the Rabbis, "even those which had still to be created, were present at the Revelation on Mount Sinai."<sup>1</sup> The freshness with which the Biblical stories are retold in the Agadic literature, the living way in which they are applied to the oppressed condition of Israel, the future hopes which are based on them, create the impression not only that in this one Revelation at Sinai the whole Scriptural history was included, but that the Rabbis and their followers, through their intense faith, rewitnessed it in their own souls, so that it became to them a personal experience. Indeed, it is this witnessing, or rather rewitnessing, to revelation by which God is God; without it he could not be God.<sup>2</sup> People who would doubt his existence and say, "there is no judgment and no judge" belong rather to the generation of the deluge, before God had entered so openly into relations with mankind.<sup>3</sup> To those who have experienced him through so many stages in their history, such doubt was simply beyond the region of possibility.

But a God who is mainly reached, not by metaphysical deductions, but through the personal experience of his operations in the world, cannot possibly be removed from or out of touch with the world. It is the heretics

<sup>1</sup> *Exod. Rabbah*, c. xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> See *Pesikta* B. 102<sup>b</sup>, and *Sifre* 141<sup>a</sup>, with allusion to p. xliii. 12. The expression כביכול (as if it were possible to say so), is used there. Weber, *ibid.* p. 150, sees in this term one of those means employed by the Rabbis with the purpose dass die Gottheit nach jüdischer Vorstellung sorgfältig von jeder Berührung mit dem menschlichen Wesen bewahrt wird; and he proceeds to say, So fehlt die Grundlage für das Verständniss der sogenannten Anthropomorphismen und Anthropopathien in der Schrift. But it will be found that this term כביכול is used in most cases by the Rabbis, when the anthropomorphism which they imply is carried farther than that implied by the Bible. The instance which I have just cited from the *Pesikta* is a case in point. Cp. also the numerous instances given by Kohut in his *Aruch Completum* כ, v. יכל.

<sup>3</sup> See *Gen. Rabbah* xxvi., and *Pseudo-Jonathan*, *Genesis* iv. 8.



who say that the world is an "automaton,"<sup>1</sup> but to the Rabbis God is not only the Creator of the world, or "he who spake and the world existed,"<sup>2</sup> but also the Father of the world,<sup>3</sup> the goodness (or the good one) of the world,<sup>4</sup> the life of the world,<sup>5</sup> the eye of the world,<sup>6</sup> the secret of the world,<sup>7</sup> the only one of the world,<sup>8</sup> the old one of the world,<sup>9</sup> the righteous one of the world,<sup>10</sup> the master or the lord of the world,<sup>11</sup> and the space (*makom*) of the world,<sup>12</sup> whilst in another place it is said of the divine presence that his chief dwelling is among those below.<sup>13</sup> It is only sin which causes his removal to

<sup>1</sup> See *Midrash Tillim* B. 13<sup>b</sup>, and note 294 by the editor.

<sup>2</sup> *Mechilta* 33<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> *Midrash Mishle* x.

<sup>4</sup> *Pesikta* B. 161<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> *Tanchuma* בִּי הַשָּׁמַיִם, section 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Gen. Rabbah* xlii.

<sup>7</sup> *Lev. Rabbah* xxiii. Cp. *Chagigah* 13<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> *Gen. Rabbah* xxi.

<sup>9</sup> *Yalkut Chronicles*, section 1074, but the reading is rather doubtful. Cp. *Ruth Rabbah* ii. 1, and commentaries.

<sup>10</sup> *Yoma* 37<sup>a</sup>. Cp. *Yalkut Mishle*, section 346.

<sup>11</sup> *Berachoth* 4<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> *Gen. Rabbah* lxviii, and *Pesikta Rabbathi*, ed. Friedmann 104<sup>a</sup>, and notes. Cp. E. Landau's essay *Die dem Raume entnommenen Synonyma für Gott in der Neuhebräischen Literatur* (Zurich, 1888), p. 30, *seq.*, where the whole literature on the subject is put together; to which Bacher *Agada der Tannaiten* i., 207, may be added. According to the passage from the *Mechilta* 52<sup>b</sup>, given there by Bacher מִכָּאן לְבֵר הַנִּדּוּל שֶׁהוּא קָרוֹי מְקוֹם it is the divine court of judgment which is called מְקוֹם. In my copy of the *Midrash Haggadol* there occurs after הַנִּדּוּל the abbreviation ב"ה which inclines me to think that the emendation of the א"צ given by Friedmann in note 26, מִכָּאן לְהַק"בָּ שְׁקָרִי מְקוֹם, has some basis of truth. The term is mainly indicative of God's ubiquity in the world. Cp. Taylor's *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, p. 53, note 42. On Landau's, note 1, p. 40, it may be remarked that the text of Gemara in the *Mishnah Berachoth*, v. 1, has לֹא־בִיָּהֶם שְׁבָשִׁיִּים instead of מְקוֹם. Cp. *Mishnah Rosh Hashana* iv. 8 וּמִשְׁעָבָדִים אֶת לִבָּם לֹא־בִיָּהֶם שְׁבָשִׁיִּים, where Mr. Lowe's ed., p. 62<sup>a</sup>, reads וּמִשְׁעָבָדִים instead of לֹא־בִיָּהֶם שְׁבָשִׁיִּים. Bishop Lightfoot's quotation (in his *Commentary to the Colossians*, p. 213) from the בְּחַיִּי on the *Pentateuch* (to Exod. xxxiv., 20), according to which God is also called עוֹלָם בְּכוֹרֵי, the "first-born of the world," is not to be found in the older Rabbinic literature, and seems to be only a later Cabbalistic term.

<sup>13</sup> See *Pesikta R.* 18<sup>b</sup>, 19<sup>a</sup>, and notes.

the upper regions. He is also compared by a Rabbi to the soul "filling the whole world, as the soul fills the body."<sup>1</sup> It is true that there are also other appellatives for God, placing him "above the world," as the heaven, the height of the world,<sup>2</sup> or the high one,<sup>3</sup> as well as a whole circle of legends—mostly concentrated round the first chapter of Ezekiel—giving mystical descriptions of his heavenly habitation.<sup>4</sup> But his heavenly dwelling-place does not prevent him from being at the same time also on earth. "Thou art the Lord our God," runs an ancient prayer, which is still recited every day, "in heaven and *on earth* and in the highest heavens of heavens;"<sup>5</sup> whilst the fact of God's appearing to Moses in the bush is taken as a proof that there is no spot on earth which is devoid of the divine presence.<sup>6</sup> And when a Rabbi was asked as to the seeming contradiction between Exod. xl. 34, according to which the glory of God filled the tabernacle, and 1 Kings viii. 27, in which it is said: "Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee," he answered, that the matter is to be compared to a cave by the shore of the sea; once the sea became stormy and inundated the land, when the cave filled with water, whilst the sea lost nothing of its contents; so the tabernacle became full of the glory of the divine presence, whilst neither heaven nor earth became empty of it.<sup>7</sup>

Nor does "height," even if we do not take it metaphorically, imply remoteness of God, or any interruption in his communion with man. Notwithstanding all distance, "God is near in every kind of nearness."<sup>8</sup> For though the distance between heaven and earth is so infinitely great, yet "when a man comes to the synagogue and prays, God listens to

<sup>1</sup> *Lev. Rabbah* iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Eccles. Rabbah* xii.

<sup>3</sup> *Baba Bathra* 133<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> See *Chagigah* 12<sup>b</sup> and 13<sup>a</sup>, and *Pesikta R.* 95<sup>b</sup> *seq.*

<sup>5</sup> See *תנא דב' אליהו*, c. xxi. Cp. Oppenheim, *Beth. Talmud* i. 375.

<sup>6</sup> *Pesikta* B. 2<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> *Pesikta R.* 19<sup>a</sup>, and parallels.

<sup>8</sup> *Jer. Berachoth* 13<sup>a</sup>.

him, for the petitioner is like a man who talks into the ear of his friend."<sup>1</sup> The same is the case with repentance, "the power of which is very great." Directly a man has a thought of repentance, it instantly reaches the throne of God.<sup>2</sup> The fact is, that the nearness of God is determined by the conduct of man, and by his realisation of this nearness, that is by his knowledge of God. Thus before Abraham made God known to his creatures, he was only the God of the heaven; but afterwards he became also the God of the earth.<sup>3</sup> Hence the patriarchs (as "models of righteousness") are the very throne (or chariot) of God,<sup>4</sup> whilst those for instance, who speak untruth, are banished from his holy presence.<sup>5</sup> That such appellatives as space, or master of the world, are not meant to imply severity or remoteness, may be seen from the following instances: "Beloved are Israel, for they are called children of space" (*makom*), as it is said: "Ye are children unto the Lord your God."<sup>6</sup> "He who helps Israel, is as if he would help space" (God).<sup>7</sup> "Israel (in Marah) was supplicating and praying before their father in heaven, like a son imploring his father, and a disciple pleading before his master, saying unto him: Lord of the world, we have sinned before thee, by our murmuring against thee on the sea."<sup>8</sup> Even the term *strength*, by which God is sometimes called,<sup>9</sup> occurs in such connection as: "When Israel does the will of God, power is added to strength."<sup>10</sup> In the Babylonian Talmud one of the most frequent appellations of God is "the merciful one," and it is worth noticing, that this term is mostly used in halachic or casuistic discussions, which proves how little in the mind of the Rabbis the Law was

<sup>1</sup> Jer. *Berachoth*, *ibid.*; cp. *Midrash Tillim*, ciii.

<sup>2</sup> *Pesikta R.* 185<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> *Gen. Rabbah* xlvii.

<sup>6</sup> *Aboth* iii., 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Mechilta* 45<sup>b</sup>. See *Aruch* s. v. ךךך.

<sup>9</sup> *Mechilta* 48<sup>b</sup>; *Shabbath* 87<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> See *Pesikta* B. 166<sup>b</sup>, cp. Kohut's *Aruch* 781.

<sup>3</sup> *Gen. Rabbah* lix.

<sup>5</sup> *Synhedrin* 102<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> See *Sifre* 22<sup>b</sup>.

connected with hardness and chastisement. To them it was an effluence of God's mercy and goodness.<sup>1</sup>

Eager, however, as the Rabbis were to establish this communion between God and the world, they were always on their guard not to permit him to be lost in the world, or to be confused with man. Hence the marked tendency, both in the Targumim and in the Hagadah, to explain away or to mitigate certain expressions in the Bible, investing the deity with corporeal qualities. The terms *Shechina* and *Memra* in the former are well known, and have been treated on by various scholars.<sup>2</sup> As to the *Agadah*, we find the general rule applied to the Bible, that the Scriptures only intended "to make the ear listen to what it can hear";<sup>3</sup> that is to say, that corporeal expressions have to be taken metaphorically or allegorically. The words: "The Lord is a man of war" (Exodus xv. 3) are contrasted with (Hos. xi. 9), "For I am God, and not man," and explained to mean that it is only for the love of Israel that God appears in such a capacity<sup>4</sup>; whilst in another passage we read that the divine presence never came down, and Moses never went up to heaven, as it is said: "The heavens are the Lord's, and the earth hath he given to the children of men."<sup>5</sup>

This last passage is not only in contradiction with some of the quotations given in the foregoing pages, but is also directly opposed to another Hagadic interpretation of this very verse from the Psalms, according to which the line

<sup>1</sup> See references of Kohut's *Aruch*, v. רחם. In *Pesachim* alone it occurs about forty-one times, but always in Halachic controversies.

<sup>2</sup> See Schürer I., 115, note 38, about the literature on this point. The term שכנה is also very frequent in the *Talmud* and *Midrashim*, see Kohut's *Aruch*, s. v., שכן. Less frequent is רבור. Cp. Landau (as above), p. 47, *seq.*, and p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Abot d. R. Nathan* i., c. 2, ל"ב מדות section 14. See Reifmann, משיב דבר, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Mechilta* 38<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> *Sukka* 5<sup>a</sup>. See Bacher i., 185.

drawn between heaven and earth was removed by the Revelation, when God came down on Mount Sinai (Ex. xix. 19), and Moses was commanded to come up unto the Lord (*ibid.*, xxiv. 1).<sup>1</sup> There is no other way in which to explain this objection of the Rabbis to take the Scriptural language in its literal sense than by attributing it to a polemic tendency against the Christian sects, who, laying too much stress on the corporeal terms in the Bible, did not rest satisfied with humanising the Deity—with endowing him with all the qualities and attributes making him accessible to man—but even insisted on deifying man. To humanise God in the sense defined, they themselves attempted; their authority was the Bible. Thus, with reference to (Exod. xv. 1) “I will sing unto the Lord,” the Rabbis say, “I will praise him” that he is terrible, as it is said, A great God, a mighty and a terrible (Deut. x. 17). “I will praise him” that he is wealthy, as it is said, The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof (Ps. xxiv. 1). “I will praise him” that he is wise, as it is said, For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding (Prov. ii. 6). “I will praise him” that he is merciful, as it is said, The Lord, the Lord God, is merciful and gracious (Exod. xxxiv. 6). “I will praise him” that he is a judge, as it is said, For the judgment is God’s (Deut. i. 17). “I will praise him” that he is faithful, as it is said, Know therefore that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God (*ibid.* vii. 9).<sup>2</sup> But to any deification of man they were strongly opposed, however noble the individual. Thus God said to Moses, according to the Rabbis, “Though I made thee a god to Pharaoh (Exod. vii. 1), thou must not become conceited (and think thyself God); I am the Lord” (*ibid.* vi. 1).<sup>3</sup> To Hiram, the Prince of Tyre, who said, “I am God; I sit in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Exod. Rabba* xiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Mechilta* 35\*. See Saalfeld, *Das Hohelied Salomons*, p. 137, about the seventy names of God.

<sup>3</sup> *Tanchuma*, ed. Buber i., 13\*.

seat of God" (Ez. xxviii. 2), God is made to say by the Rabbis: "Did Elijah, notwithstanding his reviving the dead, bringing rain, and making the fire to come down from heaven, ever make the claim to be a God?"<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, it was soon clear that the allegorising method could be turned into a very dangerous weapon against the very principle which it was meant to defend. Not only was it largely used by the adversaries of the Synagogue, as a means for justifying the abolition of the Law, but the terms which were invented to weaken or nullify anthropomorphic expressions were soon hypostatized and invested with a semi-independent existence, or personified as the creatures of God. Foreign metaphysics and theosophies, which crept into the schools, as well as angels of doubtful origin, which pleased the phantasy, but from which Judaism would have turned with abhorrence had it been conscious of their dogmatic consequences, facilitated this hypostatizing work.<sup>2</sup> This will explain the fact that along with the allegorising tendency, there is also a marked tendency in the opposite direction, insisting on the literal sense of the word of the Bible, and even exaggerating the corporeal terms.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Tanchuma בראשית*, section 7, cp. Jellinek *Beth Hamidrash* v., p. 111 and Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> See Joel's *Blicke* i., 114 *seq.* about the Jewish Gnosis.

<sup>3</sup> See Weiss' *History of Tradition* i., 111. Weber, (pp. 153 and 179), makes a difference between the Targumim and the later Rabbinism. This theory is chiefly based on the assumption of the great antiquity of the former, which is, however, contradicted by the best authorities on this subject, see Schürer i., 117. A good essay on the various heresies which the Rabbis had to face, and which would, as I believe, throw much light on the inconsistencies of the Targumim and of the Rabbis concerning the question of anthropomorphisms, is still a desideratum. That too much Targum only served to increase the danger, may be seen from the following extract from the *Midrash Hagadol* (MS.), to Exod. xxiv. 11, ויראו את אלהי ישראל ' אמר' אליעזר כל המתרגם פיסוק בצורתו הרי זה בדאי' וכל המוסיף בו הרי זה מחרף ומגדף כגון שתרגם ויראו את אלהי ישראל וחזו ית אלהא דישראל הרי זה בדאי' שהק"בה רואה ואינו

We have unfortunately no sufficient data enabling us to form a real picture of this great theological struggle. What we perceive is rather confusion and perplexity. The Rabbis were a simple naïve people, filled with a child-like Scriptural faith, neither wanting nor bearing much analysis and interpretation. "Common sense," Cardinal Newman somewhere aptly remarks, "tells us what is meant by the words 'My Lord and my God'; and a religious man upon his knees requires no commentator." More emphatically the same thought is expressed in the quaint answer of a mediæval Rabbi, who, when asked the meaning (philosophic or mystic) he was wont to give to his prayers, replied, "I pray with the meaning of this child."<sup>1</sup> Such simple people, however, were unequal to the task of meeting on the battlefield of speculation the champions of the Alexandrine schools, who were at least as accomplished "*Virtuosi*" of dogma and theosophies as the Pharisees were of religion. What to the latter was a simple adjective, a reverential expression, or a poetical metaphor, turned in the hands of the former into a new deity, an æon, or a distinct emanation. The Rabbis felt perplexed, and in their consternation and horror fell, as we saw, from one extreme into the other. But amidst all these inconveniences, contradictions,

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נראה ' תרגם וחזו ית יקר שכנית אלהא דישראל הרי זה מחרף ומגדף  
 שהוא עושה כאן שלשה יקר • ושכינה ואל. "R. Eliezer said: He  
 who translates a verse (from the Bible) literally is a liar. He who adds  
 to it commits blasphemy. For instance, if he translated (the above  
 quoted verse), *And they saw the God of Israel*, he spoke an untruth; for  
 the holy one, blessed be he, sees, but is not seen. But if he translated,  
*And they saw the glory of the Shechina of the God of Israel*, he commits  
 blasphemy, for he makes *three* (a Trinity), namely, Glory, Shechina, and  
 God." See *Kiddushin* 49\*, and *Tosephta Megilla* iv., and commentaries,  
 and cp. Berliner's edition of the *Targum*, pp. 87 and 173. This proves  
 that the objections were of a dogmatic nature. I could not identify this  
 passage as occurring anywhere else than in the MS. The fact that ר"א  
 is introducing it makes me believe that it may also have been in the  
 פרקי דר"א (perhaps c. 45). In the older Jewish literature, the Christians  
 are never introduced as Trinitarians.

<sup>1</sup> See *Responses* of R. Isaac b. Shesheth, § 157.

confusions and aberrations, the great principle of the Synagogue, that worship is only due to God, remained untouched. Into the liturgy none of the stranger appellations of God were admitted. "When man is in distress," says R. Judah, "he does not first call upon his patron, but seeks admittance to him through the medium of his servant or his agent; but it is different with God. Let no man in misfortune cry either unto Michael or Gabriel, but pray unto me (God), and I will answer him at once, as it is said: Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (Joel iii. 32).<sup>1</sup> "Come and see," says another Rabbi, "that in the portions of the Scriptures treating of sacrifices, no other name of God is ever used than the Tetragrammaton. This is done so as not to give room for heretical interpretations,"<sup>2</sup> which might claim divine worship for some other being. When the Rabbis fixed the rule, that no form of benediction is permissible in which the name of God does not occur,<sup>3</sup> they were probably guided by the same principle. At a certain period in history, when the heresy of the new sects was threatening to affect larger classes, the Rabbis even enforced the utterance of the Tetragrammaton in every benediction, lest there should be some misunderstanding as to whom prayer is directed.<sup>4</sup>

S. SCHECHTER.

*(To be continued.)*

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<sup>1</sup> Jer. *Berachoth* 10<sup>d</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> See *Sifra* 54<sup>a</sup>. Cp. Bacher (as above) i., p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> *Berachoth* 40<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> See *Tosephta Berachoth* ix., ed. Schwartz, and notes (Graetz *Geschichte*, iii., 458).